

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 NSC-10 NSCE-00 CU-04 CIAE-00 DODE-00

INR-10 NSAE-00 PA-03 RSC-01 USIA-15 PRS-01 NIC-01

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FM USLO PEKING

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 486

INFO AMCONSUL HONG KONG

C O N F I D E N T I A L PEKING 0672

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR PINT CH

SUBJ: PUBLIC SHOWING OF NEW REVOLUTIONARY OPERA

REF: PEKING 0374

1. SEVERAL USLO OFFICERS AND FAMILY MEMBERS ATTENDED PUBLIC SHOWING JULY 26 OF NEW REVOLUTIONARY PEKING OPERA "COMBAT ON THE PLAIN". THEIR IMPRESSIONS COINCIDED WITH THOSE OF USLO DRAMA CRITICS WHO WITNESSED "EXPERIMENTAL" PERFORMANCE LAST MONTH (REFTEL): STAGE-CRAFT AND ACROBATICS WERE FIRST-RATE, BUT EVERYTHING ELSE WAS JUST A REPETITION OF STANDARD ANTI-JAPANESE WAR MELODRAMA PRODUCED IN PEKING UNNUMERABLE TIMES (E.G. IN REVOLUTIONARY OPERA "SHA CHIA PANG", WHICH VIRTUALLY IDENTICAL IN PLOT AND ACTION EXCEPT FOR LOCALE -- MIDDLE YANGTZE INSTEAD OF NORTH CHINA PLAIN).

2. CHINESE AUDIENCE APPARENTLY SHARED USLO IMPRESSIONS, APART FROM SOME LAUGHTER AT SLAPSTICK COMEDY, PEOPLE STAYED QUIET. THERE WAS VITALLY NO HAND-CLAPPING IN RESPONSE TO OBVIOUS POLITICAL POINTS ACTORS WERE TRYING TO EMPHASIZE THROUGH DIALOGUE AND SONG (SUPERIORITY OF "PEOPLES WAR" OVER CONVENTIONAL WAR, THE PEOPLE FORM THE RAMPARTS IN AREAS WHERE NATURAL TERRAIN FEATURES ARE LACKING), AND SEVERAL REFERENCES TO CHAIRMAN MAO PASSED WITHOUT APPLAUSE. EVEN

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THE FINALE, WITH ACROBATS POPPING OUT OF WELLS OR

LEAPING OVER WALLS TO ATTACK THE JAPANESE, FAILED TO GENERATE MUCH ENTHUSIASM. POST-CURTAIN CLAPPING WAS PERFUNCTORY. IT WAS EQUALLED IN INTENSITY BY BURST OF CLAPPING ON PART OF CAST FROM BEHIND CURTAIN AFTER IT HAD DROPPED, PROBABLY AS GREETINGS TO HIGH-LEVEL CADRES ATTENDING.

3. PEKING AUDIENCES CANNOT BUT BE AWARE OF HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL ATTENTION BEING DIRECTED TOWARD COMBAT ON THE PLAIN. CHIANG CH'ING'S ATTENDANCE AT EXPERIMENTAL PRODUCTION HAS BEEN PUBLICIZED; ENTIRE SCRIPT OF PLAY HAS BEEN CARRIED IN PEOPLE'S DAILY, AND THERE HAVE BEEN FREQUENT SIGNED ARTICLES IN PD EXTOLLING ITS VIRTUES AND POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE. WE ACCORDINGLY FIND MUTED AUDIENCE RESPONSE RATHER CURIOUS. PERHAPS OLDER VIEWERS RECALL MUCH MORE COLORFUL TRADITIONAL PEKING OPERA AND JUDGE REVOLUTIONARY DRAMA IN THIS LIGHT; YOUNGER VIEWERS MAY FIND IT HARD TO RELATE GUERRILLA WAR ERA OF 28 YEARS AGO--BEFORE MOST OF THEM WERE BORN--TO PRESENT-DAY CIRCUMSTANCES. IN EITHER CASE, THE ARBITERS OF CHINESE CULTURE AND ART MAY NEED TO GO BACK TO THE DRAWING BOARD TO FIND A VEHICLE FOR POLITICAL MESSAGES WHICH AT THE SAME TIME WILL RETAIN AUDIENCE APPEAL.
BRUCE

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